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ABSTRACT

In the course of developing and passing the South Carolina Education Improvement Act of 1984, those behind the legislative effort observed that several factors affect successful educational reform. First, reform must be comprehensive. The 1984 act has provisions relating to academic standards, basic skills, instructional improvement, administration, community relations, school facilities, financial support, compensatory education, incentive programs, leadership training, governance, and evaluation. Second, reform is a political, consensus-building process. The South Carolina reform required the involvement of the governor and state superintendent, blue ribbon committees of state leaders, educators and educational associations, state organizations, and an informed public. Third, private sector support is indispensable. The South Carolina business community participated in the reform process, organizing several support activities. Finally, implementation problems must be anticipated and planned for, and those who helped enact the legislation must be kept involved. Among the problems anticipated in South Carolina were how to establish reasonable public expectations, assemble adequate technical assistance for local schools, monitor implementation, maintain popular support, assist local districts, improve teacher education, and coordinate all reform efforts. (PGD)

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The South Carolina Story
What Other States Can Learn!

The Honorable Richard W. Riley

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The South Carolina Story
What Other States Can Learn!

The Honorable Richard W. Riley

The people of South Carolina believe that teaching and learning is serious business. The education of our children is a necessary base for economic vitality, social mobility, personal development, and improved quality of life in our state.

Our commitment to excellence was forcefully illustrated by the passage of the South Carolina Education Improvement Act of 1984, on June 22, 1984. It was signed into law on June 28, 1984. The story behind the passage of the legislation is one which may assist other states to improve their schools. This is what we learned in South Carolina.

- School reform cannot be done piecemeal. Comprehensive reform has greater possibility for success than narrow reform measures.
- Extensive school reform is a political process of building consensus for common purposes. Everyone must share in developing the law, supporting its enactment, and working for its implementation. Problems which occur must be resolved as quickly as possible.
- The assistance of the private sector is indispensable in passing school reform legislation, especially if increased taxes are needed. The business community understands that good schools support economic development.
- Implementation problems must be anticipated and plans developed to resolve them. Those who helped to pass the law should be kept involved in implementing the law and in resolving implementation issues.

A discussion of these items may help other states to fashion their own reform programs and to learn from the South Carolina experience.

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Comprehensive school reform.

A study for the Education Commission of the States calls the South Carolina Education Improvement Act "the most comprehensive school reform program ever passed by a state legislature." In addition to being comprehensive, it contains several unique features. The eight sections of the Act deal with:

- Raising student performance by increasing academic standards.
- Strengthening the teaching and testing of the basic skills.
- Elevating the teaching profession.
- Improving leadership, management, and fiscal efficiency.
- Implementing quality controls and rewarding productivity.
- Creating more effective partnerships among schools, parents, community, and business.
- Providing school buildings conducive to improved student learning.
- Providing financial support needed to improve schools.

In addition to the items found in some reform programs, the South Carolina law has important features of its own:

- Compensatory and remedial programs for specific categories of students who need special help. The law establishes separate programs for "four-year-old children who have predicted significant readiness deficiencies;" for students "who enter school with severe deficiencies in skills, knowledge, motivation, and other requisite traits which are necessary for building successful school experiences;" and for students "who have not adequately mastered the skills and concepts presented through previous instruction." In addition, services to handicapped students have also been increased.
- Incentive programs for teachers, principals, and schools. Provisions in the law establish reward systems for those "who demonstrate superior performance and productivity." This applies to teachers, principals, and schools. The process is

one of developing criteria, field-testing, and statewide implementation. The law also demands stronger evaluation of educational personnel. Incentives are closely related to gains in pupil achievement.

- Leadership training for school principals. Individuals being considered for appointment as principals "must be assessed for his instructional leadership and management capabilities by the Assessment Center of the South Carolina Department of Education." Further, principals are required to participate in continuing education programs and to "complete a training program approved by the State Board of Education" if they receive an unsatisfactory evaluation. Principals are encouraged to participate in the activities of the Leadership Academy to improve "instructional leadership."
- A Division for Public Accountability "for the planning and development for the implementation of the Education Improvement Act." The unit head appointed by the State Superintendent of Education in consultation with the Governor, holds a position as deputy superintendent. M. Donald Thomas, former Superintendent of Schools in Salt Lake City, Utah, has been appointed to this position. The Division has responsibility for reporting progress made in the implementation of the law and for developing specific products required by the legislation.
- A provision for the State Superintendent to declare a state of emergency in a local district if the quality of education is seriously impaired. The State Board of Education is given authority to develop criteria to measure "the quality of education in the school districts of the state." In districts where education needs to be improved, a plan must be developed for "corrective action." If improvement does not occur and the situation becomes extremely serious the Governor, upon recommendation of the State Superintendent, may declare that the office of the superintendent be vacant.

- A yearly assessment of the entire reform program and a process for developing recommendations for changes in the law. The State Board of Education is given responsibility to evaluate the total Act by October 1 of each year. The assessment report is given to "the Business-Education Partnership, the Committee on Financing Excellence in Public Education, and the General Assembly." The two committees who receive the report shall develop recommendations for improvement and "shall submit their recommendations to the General Assembly prior to January first."

Both its comprehensive content and its unique features make the South Carolina law a leader in school reform. Of similar interest is the political process which created massive support for the legislation.

Process for consensus building.

It was our belief that the people of South Carolina wanted to have good schools. It was also our belief that the public would support a tax increase if we became serious about school reform. The process for building consensus on these two items, however, was a long and difficult one. At the beginning few believed that it could be done. Nevertheless, the partnerships were put together and the problems resolved through these activities:

- From the beginning the Governor and the State Superintendent worked together. They chaired committees, appeared on programs, appointed task forces, and articulated the need for better schools. Cooperation at this level was a necessary element to illustrate our support for a common cause and a unified leadership for education reform.
- Two blue-ribbon committees of state leaders from various constituency groups were appointed to shape the ideas, build public support, debate the issues, resolve the conflicts, and draft the legislation. The Business-Education Partnership and the Committee on Financing Excellence were instrumental in

building consensus among business leaders, educators, legislators, and citizens. The committees also served as the vehicles for finding common ground when differences arose.

•A state-wide campaign was initiated based on the theme "A Penny for Your Thoughts." A series of seven public forums were held throughout the state. More than 13,000 individuals met in small discussion groups of 15-20 people. Each group discussed ideas, opinions, and recommendations which were then presented to the blue-ribbon committees. Public involvement was also encouraged through day-time activities. It is estimated that over 30,000 persons participated in various meetings, discussion groups, and public presentations.

•Extensive work was conducted in cooperation with educators and educational associations. It was determined very early that the legislation needed the support and active participation of the education family. Educators were included on state committees, on various task forces, and in critical discussion from beginning to end. It was a credit to all of us that educators endorsed and supported the Act. Educators support reform action when:

-they are active in shaping policies.

-they work in cooperation with other groups, especially the private sector.

-they are assured of maximum local level decision-making under state standards.

-they are given opportunities to have their points of view thoroughly discussed.

-they are valued as significant persons.

-their leaders are consulted and appointed to prominent positions of responsibility.

-they are provided services to populations of hard-to-educate children.

•Various state organizations were given important participatory responsibilities.

Everyone was asked to assist: PTA's, League of Women Voters, civic groups, churches, public service groups, the Advertising Council, and citizens in general. We were also assisted by a positive press which reported the many activities being conducted and the various ideas and strategies under consideration.

Mrs. Riley was particularly active with parent groups and with monitoring the debate in the General Assembly. She spoke throughout the state, talked with educators, and sat in the House and Senate chambers to analyze progress being made to enact the law.

•In the final months of the campaign, nailing down the votes became the crucial responsibility of all those who supported the reform program. We also needed to resolve any last minute problems. Once we were assured of general support for sensitive items (large teacher salary increase, incentive pay programs, stronger evaluation, one-cent increase in the sales tax) the campaign to persuade legislators was intensified.

Friendly persuasion was placed on individual legislators by the entire partnership -each group or individual who had joined the coalition for quality education in South Carolina. It was this effort which convinced legislators that good schools was good business.

As we reflected on our work, one item was quickly recognized - the help of the private sector was indispensable in passing the law.

Private sector support.

The private sector and the influence of business leaders was so important that school-business partnerships became a part of the Act. The business community assisted in many important ways:

•It formed a foundation and raised over $100,000.00 to provide funds for the campaign.

•It organized chambers of commerce in support of the package. This was

particularly important in convincing business leaders to support the sales tax increase.

- It nominated persons to serve on the blue-ribbon committees and task forces which were organized throughout the campaign.
- It articulated the need for better schools as a basis for economic development in the state.
- It conducted education polls, supported media spots, and provided funds for a phone-bank. Three largest chambers of commerce in the state became powerful forces in support of reform.

The political process of building the consensus is hard work. Building partnerships between private and public sector interests requires time for discussion, negotiations, and understanding. It also must be conducted in a spirit of good will and friendly persuasion. In South Carolina we exhibit good manners, good intentions, and good feelings toward each other. It is a winning combination.

Once the legislation was passed, however, the work had only begun. Plans had to be developed to implement the Act effectively and to anticipate possible problems.

Plans for implementation.

Prior to passage of the Education Improvement Act, the State Department of Education had already developed regulations, explained the law to school personnel, and had done extensive preparatory work. The State Superintendent and his staff had acted as the law would be passed and conducted their work accordingly.

When the law was passed additional tasks were completed:

- The deputy superintendent for Public Accountability was appointed.
- Possible issues were identified and plans made to process them.

The issues identified were:

- How can accurate and reasonable public expectations be firmly established?

-What can be done to assemble adequate technical assistance for local school districts?

-How can the State Department of Education best monitor the implementation of the Education Improvement Act?

-What should be the current functions of the various groups which helped to enact the Education Improvement Act?

-What is the best process to develop in working with items for which there is limited valid research?

-What can be done to assist local school districts which may not have the capacity to implement the Education Improvement Act?

-What can be done to continue a general positive public attitude toward the Education Improvement Act and its potential for school improvement?

-What can be done to improve teacher education in the colleges and universities of South Carolina?

-How can we best unify the Education Improvement Act with other efforts to improve our schools?

•The State Department of Education set up a structure to deal with implementation problems. The structure includes local councils, regional councils, and a state council. Problems are resolved at the lowest level possible, but can receive immediate attention at the state level.

•Efforts are being made to keep the partnership active and involved. The Governor has held receptions for those who helped to enact the law. The new deputy has met with various groups to keep them interested. State Associations continue to keep implementation items on their conference agendas.

•The Governor's staff is particularly active in keeping up the momentum. They are writing articles, speaking to community groups, producing materials to explain the Act, and working in cooperation with officials at the State

Department of Education. They also continue to meet with representatives from the private sector.

The chambers of commerce and civic groups continue to be active. Throughout the state the business community remains positive. Partnerships are being built with local school districts. A state foundation to support innovative projects is being put together. Various groups and individuals participate in problem-solving activities.

Implementation will continue to require time and hard work from all of us. But the spirit is there, the torch has been lit, and people are now ready to fight the good fight to improve their schools. There is an air of positive expectations in the state, a pride in having done an excellent job and a desire to continue doing it. The law is being translated into educational programs for our children.

The various interests in South Carolina are determined to have good schools. Together we have set a high standard of excellence. In the process, we have learned some valuable lessons which may be helpful to other states. Those lessons are worth repeating:

1. A comprehensive program of school reform <u>can</u> be designed, passed, and implemented effectively.
2. Political consensus-building and problem-solving are necessary bases for success.
3. The support of educators and educational associations can be obtained if they are given extensive participatory responsibility.
4. The help of the private sector leaders is indispensable in passing school reform legislation.
5. Problems which are anticipated, prior to implementation, can be handled and resolved effectively.

School reform is now high on the national agenda. The majority of states are eager to improve public education. They understand the relationship between good

schools and other items which are valued: economic development, personal growth, social stability, and the general quality of life. In this area, South Carolina did what many believed to be impossible. It is a credit to people determined to have good schools. It is a story worth telling.